A

SERMON

Preach'd before the

COMMISSION

In *November* 1733.

From the following Texts of Scripture, *viz.*

Malachi iii. 16.
John xvi. 2.
Galat. vi. 1, 2.

By a LAY-ELDER.

EDINBURGH,
Printed by THO. LUMISDEN and JO. ROBERTSON. M. DCC. XXXIII.

A 1578/3158.

A

SERMON

Preached before the COMMISSION in *November* 1733.

INTRODUCTION.

REverend *Teaching* and honoured *Ruling* Brethren, now aſſembled by Commiſſion from the General Aſſembly of the Church of *Scotland*, allow a Brother, howſoever not dignified with the Office of *Teacher*, to preach to to you in Print, at a critical Juncture, when you have Matters of great Conſequence under Conſideration, and it is ſaid are about to *depoſe* the Brethren who have lyen under your Sentence of *Suſpenſion* ſince your laſt Meeting. Be not offended, *Reverend Brethren*, that a Lay-Brother ſhould preſume to *preach* to you on this Occaſion; he does not climb into the Pulpit without Leave, but only *uſes the Liberty of the Preſs*, which the Law gives him: Neither be angry, *Honoured Brethren*, whoſe Office it is to *rule* in the Church, as if a Brother of inferior Character *dictated* to you; for as he cannot re-

queſt a *patient Hearing*, ſo he begs a *careful Reading*, and intreats you will take it upon his Word, that he is no *Meddler* in Matters out of his Sphere, but *means honeſtly*, moved (as he hopes) by no other Motive than true filial Affection to his *Mother-Church*, at a Time when almoſt all her genuine Sons apprehend her to be in no ſmall Danger. Read then without Prejudice, and with the more Attention, that you ſee he *preaches* from ſacred Texts, and keeps cloſs to it; not pleaſing himſelf with *florid Language*, nor *founding* his Diſcourſe on the *mere Sound* of the Words, nay, nor upon a *ſuperficial analogical Senſe* of his Text, but *bottoming* it upon the true and proper Meaning, collected, as he hopes, with ſome Judgment, from the Context, and with ſtrict Regard to the Intention and Scope of the Spirit of Truth, its Author. Happy were it for the Church (ſay ſome, who are not the worſt Judges of Preaching) if this Method was more practiſed in our Pulpits, eſpecially by *junior Preachers*. He hopes it will ere long be ſo, and ſays, He ſhould think himſelf very happy if he could in any Manner contribute towards it: And he mentions this to you, becauſe he himſelf has obſerved ſome *maſſy* Texts to be, not only very ſupercifically handled by *young modiſh Preachers*, but even perverted from their genuine Scope; ſome of which ſeem to become *Common-Place Texts*, calculate for none of the beſt of Purpoſes; for Inſtance, *Matth.* vii. 21. and 2 *Peter* i. 5. This is ſo offenſive to him and many others, that he thinks of Preaching ſome Time or other upon theſe Texts, that *theſe Preachers* may have the Benefit of comparing his Sermons with their own; and, believing

it

it to be no Task to preach in their Manner, he even thinks of ſtating *their* and *his* Sermons on the ſame Text in a Compare, for the Benefit of others.

This ſhall ſuffice for *Introduction*; and therefore he proceeds to *explain* and *apply* the three Texts on the Title-Page, in the Order they are there placed, and thereby to form his Sermon.

The firſt Text is *Mal.* iii. 16. which, being exactly tranſlated, runs thus, *Then they who fear* Jehovah, *ſpeak every one to his Neighbour.*

Reverend and *Honoured Brethren*, I take the Liberty to put this and the other two Texts into the preciſe Words of the ſacred Penman, without Regard to the Tranſlation of them in our Bible, that I may explain them with the more Exactneſs. If the Sound of the Words was to found a Sentiment, it might be thought I had made Choice of this Text only to apologize for this Sermon; but the Manner of explaining this and the following Texts, and the Uſe made of them, will quickly ſhew, that I diſreliſh ſuch Uſe of ſacred Writ, and do not (in this Inſtance at leaſt) practiſe myſelf what I cenſure in others.

The *appoſite Context* commences with the 13th Verſe, and continues to the End of the Chapter, which I thus paraphraſe and explain: The *Jewiſh Clergy* of that Time, and in Conſequence thereof the *People*, (ſo true is the proverbial Speech, *Such Prieſts, ſuch People*:) The *Clergy*, I ſay, *of* and *to* whom the Prophet chiefly ſpeaks in the preceeding Part of the Chapter, under the known Deſignation of the *Sons of* Levi, whoſe Office it was to bring the Tiends into the ſacred Treaſury, theſe were the Men *whoſe Words were ſtrong a-*

gainſt Jehovah, while at the ſame Time they abſolutely denied it to be ſo, and even challenged the Prophet to produce an Inſtance of it, *v.* 13. ſaying, *What have we ſpoken againſt thee,* Jehovah? The Prophet, *v.* 14. plainly tells them what they had ſaid; *Ye ſay, It is in vain to ſerve God: For what Profit is it, that we keep his Watch, and go in Black before the Face of* Jehovah *of Hoſts, or Armies?* That is, This is the Language of your Practice, nay, of your Lips alſo in your private Cabals: Ye have quitted your Pretences to Religion, you do not any more attend Temple-Service, you reckon it uſeleſs or unprofitable; yea, you have laid aſide, not only your *grave Looks,* but *Habit* alſo, and declare, that ye have quite changed your Sentiments as to the Uſefulneſs and Value of Religion. *v.* 15. Ye ſay, *And now we eſteem the Proud happy; even they who commit Wickedneſs are built; yea, they tempt* Jehovah, *and eſcape;* That is, Ye have fallen in with the *Men of the World;* ye applaud ſucceſful Ambition, and are commenced *Infidels;* ye disbelieve a Divine Providence, yea, even the very Being of a God, becauſe you find Impiety proſperous, and conſiderable Heights of it to paſs unpuniſhed. The Text comes in, as a Thing worthy of Remark, how the truly Godly conduct themſelves at ſuch a Time, and in ſuch a State of Things; they are characteriſed *ſuch as fear* Jehovah, *i. e.* who pay the *All-ſufficient, Self-ſubſiſtent Being,* dutiful Regards, in the Character of a Covenant and Promiſe keeping God: And it is ſaid, *Then,* i. e. at ſuch a Time, when Impiety, yea Atheiſm prevails among all Ranks of Men, *they ſpeak every one to his Neighbour,* that is, They ſupply the Neglects of a diſſolute erroneous Cler-

gy;

gy, and act a Part for God, in Defence of Religion, with their Acquaintances as Opportunity offers, and become frequent in converſing with one another on ſerious Subjects; yea, endeavour to give Converſation a ſerious Turn on all proper Occaſions, and make a bold Stand againſt Error and Impiety in their proper Sphere, animated by a Zeal for Chriſt's Kingdom and Intereſt in the World, in Oppoſition to the *wicked One*, and *wicked Men* his Slaves and Tools; thus *ranking* themſelves under their *Redeemer's Banner*, under the *Standard which the Spirit of Jehovah ſets up againſt the Enemy when he cometh as a Flood*; as the eminent Prophet *Iſaiah* expreſſes it, *Chap.* lix. *v.* 19. of his Prophecy: The Effect hereof is, *Jehovah remarks it, and hears, and a Book of Remembrance is written before his Face, for thoſe who fear Jehovah, and for thoſe who meditate upon his Name*, v. 16. that is, The Covenant and Promiſe keeping God takes particular Notice of it, records it as in a Chronicle, in order to be *rewarded*, (of Grace indeed, not of Debt) as Perſons who, not only fear him, *i. e.* act in Life from a Senſe of Duty to him, as a dutiful Son does to an indulgent beloved Father; but who meditate on *his Name*, that is, the *Meſſiah*, by whom he becomes known to them, likeas, among Men, they are known and diſtinguiſhed by their Names; and who partakes of his Divine Nature as he is God, and therefore *his Name is ſaid to be in him*, Exod. xxiii. 21. and he is ſaid to be *the Image of the inviſible God*, Col. i. 15. The Old-Teſtament Saints were all earneſt Expectants of the Meſſiah's Appearance, as New-Teſtament Saints are of the Lord Chriſt's ſecond Coming. It is ſaid of them, *Verſe* 17.

And they ſhall, ſaith Jehovah of Hoſts, in that Day which I ſhall make, be to me a Property: And I will indulge them, as a Man indulgeth his Son who ſerveth him. That is, In the Time of publick deſolating Calamities, which the Lord of all the Hoſts or Armies of Creatures, brings to paſs by a ſpecial providential Adminiſtration, he will take ſpecial Cognizance of theſe who fear him, and think upon his Name, as before explained; nay, and will defend them as his *Property*, i. e. Perſons he has a peculiar Intereſt in; and will indulge, yea careſs them, as a fond Parent does a dutiful and uſeful Son. The Prophet (or rather the Spirit of Truth by him) in *Verſe* 18. declares, That *then* they, *viz.* the prophane diſſolute Clergy and People, ſhall again ſee the Difference betwixt the Righteous and the Wicked, betwixt thoſe who ſerve God and thoſe who ſerve him not; that is, *Then*, viz. at that Time, when deſolating Judgments take Place, they ſhall ſee, *i. e.* evidently perceive a peculiar benign Providence to ſuperintend the Godly, while the Wicked are abandoned and left to the Rage of Enemies, or deſtroyed by Famine and Peſtilence; and thereby be convinced, to their Coſt, of an all-governing Providence, which models human Affairs, and acts by the juſteſt Rules, in favouring godly Perſons, and deſtroying wicked Ones.

The Text and Context being thus explained, how applicable it is to us at this Time, he that runs may read. How rapid is the Progreſs Vice and Error have made among us within theſe few Years paſt? Yea, (alas for it!) how great a Change of Principles, from good to bad, have happen'd in a very ſhort Space of Time, which now begin to be owned and declared, yea, publiſhed

ſhed from our Pulpits? And what new Airs, as well as Language, are to be found with ſome of your Number, *Reverend Brethren*, even ſuch as preclude the Epithet? My Regard to the Office of *Teaching*, or *Miniſtring Elder*, reſtrains me from going deep into this Matter, or opening up the Cauſes of it, and making Remarks upon the Juniors among you: Yet I cannot forbear to explain myſelf ſo far as to ſay, *Tell it not in* Gath, *publiſh it not in Askelon*, That florid Speeches, fitted for a prophane *London* Oratory, or mere Ethicks at beſt, ſuperficial Diſcourſes in forcing Morality from *Arminian* Topicks, ſound from Pulpits in *Scotland*, in Place of ſolid ſubſtantial Chriſtianity. Are there not Men to be found, in the Character of Preachers, yea Miniſters, who cannot be found out to be ſuch, no not in the Pulpit, much leſs in other Places? And are not theatrical Tones and Geſtures in Vogue with many? If the Conſequences thereof are, the Skrewing up Kirk-power to its utmoſt Pitch, and that the Cenſuring, Suſpending and Depoſing becomes our common Practice, on other Grounds than Vice and Immorality; let it not be wondred at, if Matters in the Progeſs of Things go a much greater Length than theſe mere Thunder-Claps which have no Bolt in them. If the *Phariſaical* Temper and Principles get Footing among us, their Practices will ſoon follow at the Heels of them. You know whom they perſecuted, and to what Pitch they did it, even our Saviour himſelf, and thereafter his Followers; and how long they did ſo, even till the Nation was diſperſed, and the Country deſolated.

This leads me to the ſecond Text, *John* xvi. 2. *They will caſt you out of the Synagogues, yea, the*

the Hour comes that every one that ſhall kill you, ſhall think to do God a Service. They deſerve the greater Attention, that they are his Words, *who ſpake as never Man ſpake, who knew Man, and what was in him.* Nay, as they are among his laſt Words before he left the World, to return to the Glory he had with his Father before the World was; ſo they are a faithful compaſſionate Prediction of the Uſage *They* (viz. *his Diſciples*) were to expect from the World on his Account. The Reaſon whereof given, is the *Jewiſh* Clergy's Ignorance of Him, who ſent his Son into the World; they were *Arians*, they knew not God, in the ſacred adorable OEconomy of Father and Son, as is plain from *v.* 3. And the Deſign of this Prediction is in *v.* 1. declared to be, to prevent their being ſhock'd at the bad Uſage they ſhould meet with; and further, *v.* 4. our Saviour endeavours to convince them, that nothing could or ſhould happen to them, without the Knowledge and Conſent of him, whoſe *Wiſdom* to conduct all their Concerns here and hereafter, and *Power* to preſerve them to the heavenly Kingdom, they were abſolutely to confide in. And, as this was one great Uſe of our Text to them in their Circumſtances, and to all who ſhare in the ſame promiſed Spirit, *Chap.* xv. 26. ſo it has another eminent Uſe to us, and particularly to ſuch of you, *Reverend Brethren*, who ſeem to think, *if you let theſe Men alone*, you'll ſoon be in as bad a State as the *Jewiſh* Clergy talkt of, when they reſolved to murder the *Meſſiah*, viz. That all would run into Anarchy and Confuſion; The *Romans* (ſay they) will come and take away both our *Place* (i. e. our magnificent Temple) and People or *Nation*, John xi. 48.

I wiſh there were no Analogy betwixt their Caſe and ours; but, who can read what's ſaid, without ſeeing it? If any are ſo purblind as not to perceive it, their Sight will be cleared when they ſee the Parallel run in Fact; that is, when they ſee the *Romaniſts* coming into our Iſland, deſolating it, and putting an End both to our Church and Nation, as the Puniſhment of a perſecuting Spirit among us; like as the *Scribes* and *Phariſees*, the *Jewiſh Clergy* and *Laity*, by crucifying the *Meſſiah*, and perſecuting his Diſciples, run themſelves into that very Calamity they propoſed to ſhun by it. I have no Pretences to the Spirit of Prophecy; but he is a ſhallow Politician, who does not ſee whither the Scenes of Things now opening in *Europe* do tend, in the regular Courſe of human Affairs; and he is no leſs an uninſtructed Chriſtian, who does not know, that in the Divine Procedure, as *Judge of the Earth*, deſolating Calamities are at Hand: And therefore I ſcruple not to foretel, That, if Error and Vice proceed to extend themſelves without a Check, and if Kirk-Power, which is chiefly calculated to curb theſe, be employed againſt pious and good Men; the Time is not diſtant, when an Army of *French*, and another of *Spaniards*, with a Popiſh Pretender at their Head, aſſiſted by Famine and Peſtilence, will ravage the Iſland, and put an End to theſe Evils, by ſweeping off the preſent Generation of erroneous and vitious Men; while God will hide his own, as in a *Chamber of Retirement*, till the *Indignation paſs away*, and even ſhew ſome of them better Times than have hitherto been. But, *Brethren* of both *Denominations*, I ſhall reſolutely hope to the laſt better Things of you, than your proceeding further to the

Mea-

Meaſure of obtruding *junior Preachers* of lax Morals and Principles upon Pariſhes, merely to pleaſe *Patrons* and *diſaffected Heritors*; and *of cenſuring* ſeverely honeſt zealous Miniſters. And therefore it is, that I ſet in your View, from my third Text, the proper Temper and Diſpoſition which ſuits your ſeveral Offices, and becomes the Elders of a Chriſtian Church, with regard to your *ſuſpended Brethren*.

The Text you'll find *Gal.* vi. 1, 2. and according to the better Tranſlation expreſſed thus, *v.* 1. *Brethren, if a Man were overtaken even by ſome Treſpaſs, or Crime, ye who are ſpiritual bring ſuch a one to Rights, with the Spirit of Meekneſs; looking to yourſelves, that you may not alſo be tempted.* v. 2. *Bear one another's Burdens, and thus fulfil the Law of Chriſt.*

The Apoſtle, in the preceeding Part of the Epiſtle, having apoſtolically rebuked the *Galatians* for their *Phariſaiſm*, or, in modern Terms, *Arminianiſm*, and ſhewed them its utter Inconſiſtency with true Chriſtianity, in the immediately preceeding Chapter; he here takes notice of the Effect of Errors getting in amongſt them, *viz.* The Introducing of Alienation, ripening into Hatred and Injuries: Nay, and ſhews them the Cauſe of theſe Evils in the Erroneous, to be their *Laxneſs in Practice*; they did not *walk through the Spirit*, that is, they were not taught, influenced and conducted by the *Spirit of Truth*; neither did they regulate their Conduct in Life, by his Dictates; but governed themſelves by ambitious Proſpects: And therefore he cautions them, in the laſt Verſe of that Chapter, againſt being *Seekers of Vain-glory, provoking one another, and envying one another*; that is, againſt coveting and ha-

haſtning after Places of Honour and Power, and in theſe Places behaving with Inſolence and Severity.

The Text is a noble and wiſe Rule of Conduct, apoſtolically given, and with the true Spirit of Meekneſs; he addreſſes himſelf to the Orthodox *Galatians*, under the endearing Epithet of *Brethren*, and Deſignation of *ſpiritual Perſons*, that is, in whom the Spirit of Chriſt (called by him the *Holy Spirit*, and *Spirit of Truth*) abides and dwells, giving them a Senſation of heavenly and ſpiritual Things; and further adviſes them, to conſider their *ſeduced Brethren* as in a State of Temptation, hurried away from Orthodoxy by its Violence; and exhorts or injoins them, to reclaim the *worſt* of them, even ſuch as had fallen into a *Treſpaſs* or Crime, that is, ſomething that was ſcandalous and offenſive, by calm Meaſures and diſcreet Uſage, and enforcing his Exhortation with this ſtrong Argument, That the contrary Behaviour might provoke God to leave them to themſelves, and permit Satan to tempt them; in which Caſe, they would fall into the ſame, or worſe Crimes: Therefore he bids them *bear one another's Burdens*, that is, ſympathize with one another with true Chriſtian Sympathy; and, in ſo doing, fulfil Chriſt's peculiar Law or Command, which is, to *love one another*, in the Character of Chriſtians; and to do ſo on *his Account*, the ſure Source of true Affection and Compaſſion in any Situation, and an effectual Guard againſt provoking Expreſſions, or ſevere Anſwers.

This Text, thus explain'd, is ſo plain and pat to the preſent Purpoſe, that it applies itſelf: I ſhall therefore, after a few Reflections, conclude with a humble

humble Advice to each of you (as claſſed under the Denomination of *Teaching* and *Ruling* Elders) and heartily pray, that this extraordinary Sermon may be of Uſe to both of you, and likewiſe to others who are not Members of the Commiſſion. As for the Preacher, it is not worth While to enquire about him: And, as he is alone in this Attempt to ſerve his Mother-Church, and you his *Reverend* and *Honoured* Brethren, Members of this Commiſſion in particular, ſo he knows he cannot be traced and found out. Mean Time he declares, he is neither afraid, nor aſhamed to own the Performance, and poſſibly may publiſh who he is in due Time; and aſſures you, it is for quite other Reaſons than either *Fear* or *Shame*, even laudable ones, that he conceals himſelf at preſent.

The *Reflections*, or, if you pleaſe, the *Obſervations*, I make, and ſubmit to your ſerious Conſideration, are, 1*ſt*, That the Juncture of Time in which you are met is critical with regard to the State of Affairs in *Europe*: A War is commenced, in which 'tis probable *Britain* will ſoon be engaged, and that againſt *France* and *Spain*, our inveterate Enemies, as well as our neareſt, moſt powerful, and moſt dangerous Neighbours; at a Time, when Factions and Diſſentions are run up to the greateſt Pitch: Is it then Time, think ye, to increaſe theſe, by making a Schiſm in our Mother-Church? Do not our known and avowed Enemies rejoice at the Proſpect of it? And, can any poſſible Good be hoped for by it? *Next*, That the Juncture is no leſs critical, with regard to the Affair itſelf which of Courſe comes in before you: The Eyes of all the Well-wiſhers to our happy and comfortable Eſtabliſhment in

Church

Church and State, are fixed upon you; they tremble to think of the Conſequences of a Separation; you cannot but know, that the *cenſured Miniſters* will, and muſt ſeparate from you, and take the Benefit of the Toleration-Act, if they are depoſed: And *you do not know* how far this Separation may go in the Courſe of a little Time, even ſo far, as to leave you, *Reverend Brethren*, thin Congregations, even in *Edinburgh*. Aſſure yourſelves of it, that, if once the Separation comes to turn upon its true Hinge, which at the Bottom is really, that the Majority among you ſeem to own the *Arminian* and *Baxterian* Tenets (not to ſpeak of *Arianiſm*, *Socinianiſm*, yea *Deiſm*) as you have already done *Eraſtian Patronage*. *Laſtly*, That you are accountable to God and Poſterity for all the fatal Conſequences of ſo raſh a Step, as the Depoſition of the *valued Brethren*, now under your Cenſure, upon ſo ſlight a Ground, as ſtriking out againſt your Authority. Ye, who make the Majority in ſuch a Meaſure, muſt expect to be inliſted in the Manner ſome other Gentlemen have been of late: This Sermon will witneſs that ye were warned, and you are like to be recorded as *Pontius Pilate* is in the Creed, how much to your Honour or Safety, judge for yourſelves.

The Humble Advice I therefore give to you, *Reverend Brethren*, in the *firſt* Place, is, To beware of proceeding to depoſe your honeſt, zealous *Brethren*, who, in the Opinion of a great Number of firm Friends to our Mother-Church, have already fallen under too ſevere a Cenſure. Stop ſhort in Time; you don't know what Length you may go, if once you make that Step. Remember, the World has long ſince made the ill-natured Obſervation, That Clergymen of a perſecuting

ting Spirit are the moſt violent and virulent of Men, under the Pretext of Meekneſs and Temper; and do produce the Popiſh Inquiſition for an Inſtance. Don't think yourſelves Proof even againſt Barbarities themſelves: Ye who are of that Spirit, remember *Hazael*'s Expreſſion when his Barbarity was foretold him, and remark his Practice afterwards.

As for you, *Honoured Brethren*, your Office is to *Rule*; and you *rule* well, when you *overrule* the impetuous Temper of ſome of your *Teaching Brethren*: Beware then of being *ruled* by them, and prompted to raſh and ſevere Meaſures. But much more, beware of overruling theſe *Brethren* in this Commiſſion, of whom it is ſaid, and I hope it is true, that the Majority are not for deposing the ſuſpended Miniſters: Remember ye are Gentlemen, and thereby have Opportunity to ſee and know more of the World than your *Teaching Brethren*; don't give Countenance to any violent ambitious Men among them: Allow me to put you in Mind of the Calamities which came upon our Country in an *Ante-Revolution Reign* by which ſome of your own Families ſuffered ſeverely; and that theſe Calamities were brought about by the Management of one *ſly*, *covetous*, *violent*, *ambitious* Clergyman. And believe it not to be impoſſible, that the Step ye are now in is feared about to take, may facilitate a foreign Invaſion, which will indeed (ſay ſome) put an End to Presbyterial Kirk-Tyranny, and I add to Civil Liberty, and to every Thing that's valuable to us as Men and as Chriſtians. May God avert ſuch a Stroke, and may you be kept from giving any Encouragement to the Enemies of the Nation to make an Attempt upon it!

FINIS.